
Urban Forestry – Civic Service Review

Recommendation

That the report of the General Manager, Community Services Department dated June 12, 2017 be forwarded to City Council recommending:

1. That the information be received; and
2. That the current service level be acknowledged and approved for 2017.

Topic and Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the findings within the Urban Forestry Civic Service Review and provide information on the current service level provided under the Urban Forestry service line and options for alternative service levels.

Report Highlights

1. There are three key components to the Civic Service Review Process: outlining the current state, defining success for citizens and other customers, and designing the desired future state.
2. The review identified ideas to:
 - improve communication between workgroups within Urban Forestry;
 - increase collaboration with other Parks Division workgroups;
 - increase collaboration with other divisions (like Construction and Design); and
 - to improve citizen service through the introduction of new service level options for service request response.
3. Potential benefits of employee improvement ideas include:
 - ongoing staff time savings of more than \$25,000;
 - increased options for citizens when having a tree removed or replanted; and
 - improvements to bylaws and policies as they relate to the protection and maintenance of civic trees.
4. Two service level analyses were completed, finding:
 - the service level for street trees includes a 1:7 year pruning cycle and is currently being met; however, the pruning cycle for park trees requires revision or additional funding to meet a similar standard;
 - service level options are included in the report; and
 - the service level for addressing service requests can be improved with more options for citizens.
5. As a direct result of this Civic Service Review, a partnership has been established with Parks and a Performance Improvement Coordinator from the Employee, Experience, and Performance Division to address additional issues brought forward regarding internal process definition and stakeholder communication. Additional reports will be brought forward for direction on City Council Policy C09-011, "Trees on City Property" and other Parks core service areas as the partnership progresses.

Strategic Goals

This report supports the Strategic Goals of Quality of Life, Continuous Improvement, and Asset and Financial Sustainability. Process and efficiency improvements focus on reducing manual processes by leveraging technology. Process improvements of this nature will reduce the time to complete service requests, planned work, and updating tree inventory data. Increasing efficiency and effectiveness in service provision ensures the City of Saskatoon (City) is investing in what matters and managing resources in a long-term sustainable way. Defined service levels ensure that the City is making informed financial decisions and investing in services that matter to citizens.

Background

City Council, at its meeting held on December 3 and 4, 2013, approved the Continuous Improvement Strategy which includes the following three components:

- Annual Civic Service Reviews - an operational review process to find ways to control expenditures and to seek efficiencies in the delivery of municipal programs and services;
- Internal Process Reviews - focus on identifying and removing redundancies and waste within existing processes to increase efficiencies in civic operations; and
- Building capacity in the Corporation through innovation coaches and empowering employees.

See Attachment 1 for the Continuous Improvement Strategy Overview.

At the May 23, 2017 City Council meeting, the 2018 Indicative Rate Report indicated that Urban Forestry would be one of eight core services bringing forward a formal service level document for consideration and approval by City Council prior to the 2018 Business Plan and Budget deliberations.

Report

Review Findings: Ideas for Improvement

The Urban Forestry Civic Service Review explored opportunities for efficiency improvement throughout the Urban Forestry team's operations with focused effort on tree inventory and tree maintenance related work. The review team included staff from all levels of Urban Forestry and other workgroups within the Parks Division as well as support from the IT Division (Attachment 2 provides an overview of the review's discussions and findings).

To begin the review, an internal survey was conducted with members of the Urban Forestry team. The survey asked frontline employees what could be improved in current operations to better serve the community, internal customers, and the urban forest.

Responses to these survey questions indicated that staff believe that increased efforts in customer service and public education, staff training and retention, the use of technology, and changes to the planting and maintenance programming could improve the current state of the Urban Forestry program.

Following the internal survey, team meetings were then held with staff at all levels within Urban Forestry. The purpose of these meetings was to work through the Continuous Improvement strategy of examining the current state, defining what success looks like in terms of customer expectations and then looking ahead at what the future state should be. A summary of the resulting ideas generated are outlined below (for a listing of all ideas and further details see Attachment 2 [page 6-8]).

1. Revise City Council Policy C09-011 “Trees on City Property” and provide a report on recommendations to update the policy to City Council. Review should focus on service to citizens and include updates to potentially add options and flexibility to services provided while continuing to protect the urban forest. These optional service levels may include a “user pay for expedited services” model. These service level options would need to be brought to City Council for budgetary decisions.
2. Work with internal partners to ensure that Parks Division is truly engaged early enough in planning processes to have influence over items that impact the life cycle of the urban forest from planting to pruning and inspection to removal and stumping. In particular, senior staff from Parks need to be key team members in the Right of Way, Tree Trimming, and Back lanes Civic Service Reviews.
3. Focus on service levels and define them by what is currently funded and how that impacts the health and wellbeing of the urban forest and provides the greatest overall benefit to the public. Provide service level options to City Council for funding decisions based on the impact they will have on service provision to citizens.

Implementation of improvement ideas from the review will create enough staff time savings to absorb the estimated \$25,000 cost of upgrading the tree manager software system in 2017.

Review Findings: Service Levels for Tree Maintenance and Service Requests

Analysis of tree maintenance performance over the last three years suggests the current planned 1:7 year pruning/maintenance service level is being met for street trees. The service level achieved with existing budget parameters for park trees is a 1:13 year pruning cycle.

Optimal pruning cycles are determined by municipalities depending on a number of factors including climate, tree species composition within the urban forest, disease risk, and funding. The Parks Urban Forestry Section has determined through experience, that the 1:7 year proactive pruning cycle strikes the best balance in Saskatoon for efficient and effective use of funds and staff time for prevention of deadwood that harbours diseases and pests. This service level also reduces the demand for out of cycle service requests for clearance and safety issues and helps to mitigate liability from damage caused from fallen branches.

If the desire is to meet a service level of 1:7 year pruning cycle in park trees, an additional 3,000 trees would need to be pruned every year. At an average cost of \$140 per tree, the Urban Forestry budget would need to be increased by \$420,000 to attain this service level.

Attachment 3 outlines three options for service level funding for Urban Forestry:

- Option 1 has current funding levels remaining in place and the service level for street trees set at 1:7 year pruning cycle and park trees at 1:13 year pruning cycle;
- Option 2 increases funding to the Urban Forestry service line by \$140,000 annually to provide a service level for park trees of 1:10 years; the service level of 1:7 year pruning cycle for street trees remains the same; and
- Option 3 increases the funding to the Urban Forestry service line by \$420,000 annually to provide a service level for park trees of 1:7 years; the service level of 1:7 year pruning cycle for street trees remains the same.

Analysis of specific service request response times suggest that tree removal and tree replanting requests can have long wait times for citizens. For example, the tree removal, stumping, and replanting process can take as long as two years. Review discussions suggested the service level could be improved through the creation of an “express service model.” Citizens that are satisfied with the current processing time would receive their service as part of their property tax payments and those who wanted “express service” would pay for this through a cost-recovery model (for more information see Attachment 3).

Communication Plan

Civic Service Reviews provide an opportunity for the public to learn more about the City’s operations, the costs to deliver the services, and to provide feedback and input into how the City can deliver its services more efficiently. The approved levels will be communicated using the Service Saskatoon citizen centric simple language model so citizens know what services they can expect.

Results from the Civic Service Reviews will be communicated on the City’s website in the ‘Latest Strides’ and/or ‘City Spotlight’ sections of the *Our Performance* page at www.saskatoon.ca/strides.

Financial Implications

The \$25,000 savings from the implementation of the new software will be redeployed in 2018 to address the data entry backlog of tree inventory and provide additional analysis of tree maintenance services to further refine service levels.

Depending on which service level option is selected for 2018, additional funding may be required as per the options outlined in Attachment 3.

Increasing the pruning cycle time may increase costs associated with damages caused by falling deadwood and structurally unsound trees.

Other Considerations/Implications

There are no policy, Privacy, or CPTED implications or considerations.

Environmental Implications

Environmental considerations of longer pruning cycles include the increased accumulation of deadwood in trees between pruning cycles allowing for proliferation of disease and pest damage to the urban forest.

Due Date for Follow-up

Follow-up reports related to key findings of this report will be brought forward to the Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services Committee for approval. Action plans and recommendations will be incorporated into the annual business planning and budgeting process for the Parks Division.

Public Notice

Public Notice pursuant to Section 3 of Policy No. C01-021, Public Notice Policy, is not required.

Attachments

1. Continuous Improvement Strategy Overview
2. Urban Forestry Civic Service Review Executive Summary
3. Urban Forestry Service Level

Report Approval

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